



FEMA

Asheville Businesses High & Dry Ordinances Effective for Businesses

Asheville, NC - When the Swannanoa River broke its banks and swamped the Biltmore business district of Asheville, N.C. in early Sept. 2004, tough new building ordinances kept a number of businesses high and dry. Unfortunately, many older buildings surrounding them suffered extensive flood damage and, in some cases, were destroyed.

In 1996, Buncombe County and the City of Asheville received updated county-wide floodplain maps from FEMA as part of the federal agency's ongoing national flood map revision process. Using information from the revised maps, the City of Asheville chose to put in place tough ordinances on future construction requiring new businesses to be built one foot above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE).

The 2004 floods resulting from Tropical Storm Frances and Hurricane Ivan put the revised maps and ordinances to the test for the first time. On the nights of Sept. 7-8, Tropical Storm Frances dumped 17 inches of rain on Black Mountain, up the river from the Biltmore business district. By morning, streets and parking lots looked like lakes and dozens of businesses were faced with several feet of floodwater destroying their buildings, inventories and profits. The exceptions were those buildings constructed after the 1996 ordinances took effect.

One example is the Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse Store located right alongside the river. Constructed in 1998-99, the site required extensive grading, earthmoving and drainage work to comply with Asheville's new ordinances. Soil was excavated from the parking lot site and used to elevate the huge store one foot above the BFE. During the flood, water swamped the parking lot but stopped short of entering the building. The store lost no merchandise and reopened for business as soon as water receded from the parking lot. It became an important asset to a flooded community in need of building materials.

Other businesses that stayed high and dry include a McDonald's restaurant and a Krystal Citi Stop convenience store, both built since the new ordinances took effect. Both were untouched by the flood, which did extensive damage to businesses all around them.

"We were very happy to see our flood zone planning and ordinances pay off," said Natalie Berry, Stormwater and Erosion Control Coordinator for the City of Asheville. "It was important to the employees, their customers and our local economy that they were right back in business after the flood."



**Buncombe County,
North Carolina**



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Building Codes

Primary Funding:

Property Owner, Commercial